

TIPS FOR MANAGERS ON ACHIEVING QUALITY PERFORMANCE

The primary job of managers and directors is to help their organizations achieve top level performance. Management focus on three areas is necessary for achieving top level performance. Those areas are:

1. Quality work as the goal of organization.
2. People as the ones who make quality happen, and
3. Innovation as the method of constant improvement.

As a manager or director, your leadership in each of these areas is necessary for achieving quality through people and their innovations. In addition, you need to ensure that your county is organized effectively so as not to inhibit attainment of quality through people and their innovations. The focus of this document is to detail steps to set up an effective corrective action process for addressing and preventing errors. The goal of the corrective action committee is to achieve high accuracy in the administration of eligibility programs (although the process works well in other areas related to continuous improvement such as business process changes).

I. Leading your organization to top level performance:

- When focusing on achieving excellence in accuracy and performance, ask yourself:
 - ◆ Which section of the organization has direct responsibility for case errors and performance?
 - ◆ Which section of the organization has direct responsibility for corrective action?

If you haven't answered Line Operations/District Offices (or the managers in charge of those functions) to both questions, strongly consider having Line Operations/District Offices take primary responsibility for planning and implementing corrective action. Without merging those functions, the other sections in charge of corrective actions are continually in the position of trying to sell Line Operations/District Offices on doing specific actions.

- It is very important to involve staff at all levels in the process. Your best line staff and supervisors should be included in the committee. The persons closest to the work tend to know best where specific improvements could be made and what is really going wrong. Additionally, to the extent ideas for improvement come from those doing the work, there is much greater buy-in by those who will need to implement any changes.

- In a large county, this may need to take place in each office and the input of each office be brought forward to the central office committee.
- The Policy/Program sections, the Evaluation/Quality Control (QC) Review and Systems sections should be the support sections for Line Operations/District Offices for the area of corrective action.
- It is important to encourage those major sections to work together cooperatively to achieve the common goal of improved performance.
- Foster cooperation among divisions, management, and line staff by instituting regular and informal communication, on trust rather than control.
- Encourage sharing of power/accolades to accomplish tasks.
- Replace any antagonism with partnership.
- Building a good team is the first step but unless the team has a robust, analytical process for the corrective action process, the group may not be effective. The attached training handouts describe a classic problem solving process which includes identifying and defining the problem; defining the cause thoughtfully, developing and evaluating solutions, implementing the solution, then monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the solution in terms of fixing or mitigating the problem. If your corrective action team has not been trained in problem solving or tends to jump to conclusions or quick fixes, it may be helpful to use the training materials provided.
- Once you form the team, it is important that staff see management commitment to continuous improvement. Ensure the group meets regularly and check in on progress on a routine basis. If it's important, everyone needs to make time for it.

Specific suggestions of things managers and directors can do to help obtain quality, emphasize the importance of people in your organization, and encourage innovation are listed below.

II. Showing the importance you place on quality work:

- talk to managers and line staff often about Quality Control (QC) results and about their role in corrective action (CA)
- listen to them about what they see as their role in QC and corrective action.
- talk about QC and corrective action repeatedly, at every possible opportunity, make it a personal theme
- tell staff what you expect in terms of their performance

- solicit from staff their input on specific measures and standards of performance
- have high standards and expectations, people will achieve them, no one likes to disappoint the boss
- attend, participate or give opening remarks at corrective action meetings and workshops
- give a QC/CA talk at Eligibility Worker (EW) induction training, at refresher training and at supervisory training
- have reports sent to you on district, unit and worker performance
- publish the results frequently by office/unit so staff can see progress. Staff pay attention to what management measures and where it focuses its attention.
- respond to those reports-phone calls, thank you notes, memos or brief visits (for example, "I just stopped by to tell you thanks for the great work") contacts for good performers and for staff needing improvement.
- Supervisors need to provide support for staff needing improvement as well as for top level performers. For staff needing improvement you might say, "I saw the case review results. It's important to me to see that you get what you need to be one of the top performers. Let's schedule a time for you all to talk about what your needs are and how you and we can go about meeting those needs. I'm looking forward to the helping you become one of the top performers."

III. Paying attention to people and showing your interest in them to obtain top quality performance:

- write thank you notes to:
 - Top performers
 - Courteous line and other staff with public contact
 - People in other divisions, sections, and organizations who helped your group do a good job
- have staff share a couple top success stories from the last month (quarter or year) involving improvement in quality, service, or cooperation among organizational units; this could be done at staff meetings, district office or unit meetings, have the people involved in the improvement attend the meeting
- have informal coffee breaks or lunches with line staff and ask them what the one thing is you can do for them this year

- attend a day of entry level EW training to see first-hand what goes on, what EW needs are and to show them the importance of their job
- spend time each month with line staff doing the job they're doing
- listen to line and other staff (if you want to learn about their perceptions, their needs and concerns, then listen)
- be emotionally involved with people's successes and innovations; be enthusiastic and be sincere. Be involved and do it in your own style
- have informal contact with staff (coffee, cards, etc.) and encourage other managers to do the same
- celebrate success!

IV. Encouraging innovation for achieving top level performance:

- start a corrective action newsletter, include columns on QC success, eligibility tips, problems and how they were resolved, and on nifty, quick and dirty experiments line staff are using
- eliminate unnecessary reports, forms or procedures; try instituting trust and responsibility in lieu of paper controls
- think about and look for the small, seemingly routine innovations to praise (the big ones already come to your attention and receive praise)
- Institute the pursuit of constant improvement at all levels as a goal; recognize and reward the innovators
- write thank you notes for small improvement-aimed experiments, even when they're not successful (remember your goal is to encourage innovation not create fear of failure)
- give awards at staff meetings or at district office corrective action committee meetings for the :
 - best improvement of the month
 - best improvement idea swiped from other offices, counties, etc.
- involve line staff in corrective action, in forms development, in case reviews and in planning for awards and recognition of staff and their ideas.

Summary

The point of these suggestions is to give you ideas about how you can affect actual casework performance. By emphasizing quality, expecting quality, recognizing and praising attempts at achieving quality through paying attention to people and their innovations, your county can be a top level performer.